

Laos

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C.I.A. Says It Maintains Force of 30,000 in Laos

By JOHN W. FINNEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 2.—The Nixon Administration acknowledged today, through a Senate subcommittee staff report, that the Central Intelligence Agency was maintaining a 30,000-man "irregular" force now fighting throughout most of Laos.

Many news articles in recent years have described C.I.A. sponsorship of an irregular army in Laos. However, the subcommittee report represented the first time that the agency publicly and officially confirmed its military activities in Laos. The report indicated that the use of the irregular units in Laos was more widespread than had been indicated in the news accounts.

The force has become the

cutting edge" of the Royal Laotian Army, according to the report, and has been supplemented by Thai "volunteers" recruited and paid by the C.I.A. The agency's involvement in the secret war in Laos was first confirmed officially in a staff report prepared for the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on foreign commitments by James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose, two former Foreign Service officers who made an inspection trip to Laos in April. A version of their report, once classified top secret, was made public today after clearance by the C.I.A. as well as the State and Defense Departments.

Publication of the detailed 23-page report marks the formal acknowledgement of the secret

war that the United States has been conducting in Laos ever since the breakdown of the 1962 Geneva accords, which were supposed to re-establish the neutrality of that country.

In making public the report, Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri, the subcommittee chairman, said: "It is an encouraging sign that the executive branch has finally agreed that much of the United States

Government has been doing in Laos may now be made public. The veil of secrecy which has long kept this secret war in Laos officially hidden from the American people has been partially lifted."

Senator Symington explained, however, that the executive branch was still refusing to make public "certain truths concerning the nature, composition and command arrangements of the Thai forces in Laos." The information the Administration has refused to make public, he said, bears on the question whether the recruitment of the Thai forces violates a provision against hiring soldiers that was written into the Defense appropriations Act last year.

One fact kept secret by the executive branch is the presence in Laos—referred to in the past by Senator J. W. Fulbright—of a series of Thai generals who use the Thai equivalent of John Doe as their names. The senator did not give the Thai equivalent. In contending that the provision against hiring troops is not being violated, the State Department has argued that the Thai volunteers came under the command of the Royal Laotian Army.

Out of the report came the first detailed description of the rapidly rising cost of the American military involvement in a war in which, the report observed, "the Royal Lao Government continues to be almost totally dependent on the United States, perhaps more dependent on us than any other government in the world."

U.S. Spent \$284.2-Million

In the fiscal year 1970, which ended on July 1, a "partial total" of United States expenditures in Laos came to \$284.2-million, of which \$162.2-million was for military aid, \$52-million for economic aid and \$70-million was spent by the C.I.A. exclusive of the amount spent on the Thai forces.

This was the first time that the C.I.A. has permitted disclosure of its spending in Laos, and even then the figure came out indirectly through subtraction from over-all estimates included in the report.

In the current fiscal year, the report said, the estimated cost of military assistance has "risen rapidly," doubling since January, mostly because of increased ammunition being furnished the Royal Laotian and irregular

forces. The cost of military and economic aid plus the C.I.A. programs is now expected to come to \$374-million in the current fiscal year. At that level, the report observed, the cost will be more than three times as large as it was in fiscal 1967 and 25 times as large as when United States assistance began nine years ago.

Not included in these estimates were the costs of United States bombing operations in northern Laos in support of the Royal Laotian forces and in southern Laos against the Ho Chi Minh supply line used by North Vietnam.

The report said that American operations in Laos had declined over the last two years, with United States planes aver-

aging 340 sorties a day in April, compared with a daily rate of 440 in the first part of 1969. At the same time, B-25 bombing in northern Laos has increased since it was begun in February, 1970, with what amounts to "free fire zones" being established for the bombers. These zones have been cleared of the civilian population and any activity in them can be considered to be supporting the enemy.

The report also said that in recent months the Chinese Communists have increased their air defenses along the road they are building in northern Laos, making the "area one of the most heavily defended in the world." The Chinese, the report said, have moved in "a heavy new increment" of radar-directed antiaircraft guns, raising the total to 395, including for the first time 85-mm. and 100-mm. guns that are effective up to 68,000 feet.

The area around the Chinese-built road is "off limits" to American planes, but the report noted that on at least two occasions the road had been attacked by unmarked Royal Laos air force T-28's furnished by the United States.

The Chinese build-up of anti-aircraft defenses began after an attack by two Laotian planes in January, 1970.

In the last two years, the report said, the size of the Chinese forces along the road has increased from 6,000 to between 14,000 and 20,000. Since November, 1970, the Chinese, in addition to "upgrading earlier road construction," have constructed eight small-arms firing ranges of a kind normally associated with garrisons of ground troops as well as a large headquarters building and 66 barracks.

The Chinese road stretches from the Chinese border to Muang Sai in north-central Laos, with branches extending toward Dien Bien Phu in North Vietnam and toward the Thai border. The purpose of the road remains unclear, but the report observes that in terms of "areas of influence," the "practical effect of the Chinese road is that the Chinese border has already been shifted southward to encompass a substantial portion of northern Laos."

To subcommittee members, probably the most significant disclosure of the report was confirmation that their irregular units in Laos are "trained, equipped, supported, advised and to a great extent organized by the C.I.A."

The "B-1 units," as they are known (for the French term "battalions guerriers"), "have become the cutting edge of the military," the report said, "leaving the Royal Lao Army as a force primarily devoted to a static defense."

These units began as a force of Meo tribesmen under Gen. Yang Pa operating around the Plain des Jarres, but now, the report said, they are operating in all sections of Laos except a small military region around Vientiane, the administrative capital.

Except for a 1,500-man cadre from the Royal Lao Army, all members of these units, according to the report, are "volunteers," with their rations and pay supplied indirectly by the C.I.A. and guaranteed evacuation of wounded by air American helicopters.

At one point in 1968-69, the size of the irregular forces totaled 38,000 men, according to the report, but it is now down to about 30,000 men,

largely because of desertions, heavy casualties and "financial restraints incurred by budgetary limitations."

With the military manpower base in Laos "exhausted," the report said, the agency turned to Thai "volunteers" to supplement the irregular forces.

The precise number of Thai "volunteers" in Laos was deleted from the report, but Senator Clifford P. Case of New Jersey and Senator Fulbright have used a figure of about 4,800.

The report—made public in its declassified form, with gaps representing security delin-

Most of the irregulars have been recruited, we were told, as a volunteer force outside the Thai army, although (deleted).

The C.I.A., the report said, "supervises and pays for the training of these irregulars in Thailand and provides their salary, allowances (including death benefits) and operational costs in Laos." In addition, they are transported to and from Laos in planes of Air America—an air operation in Laos supported by American intelligence.

On the question why the Thai irregulars were wanted, the report said, "We were told that the embassy wanted to (deleted) the (deleted) with (deleted) because the (deleted) were more mobile and thus 'could do things the others could not do'."

Conclusion Generally Gloomy

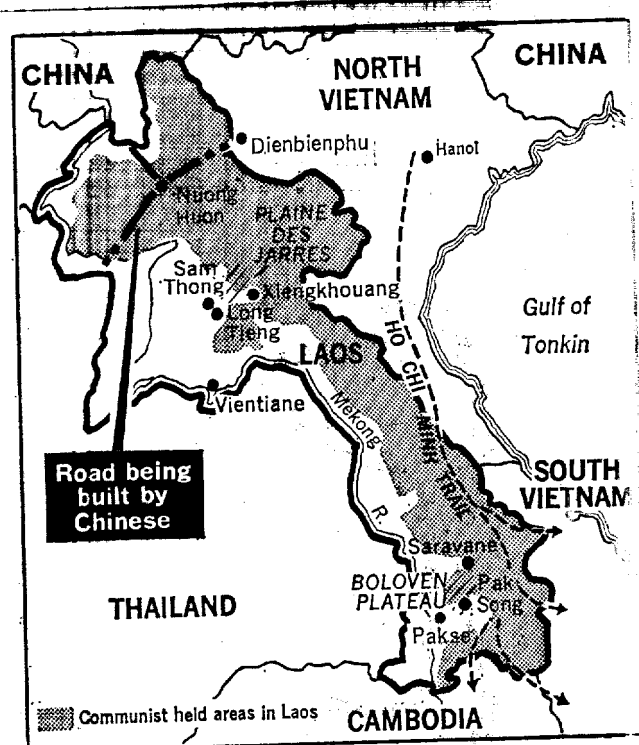
The report reached a generally gloomy conclusion about the military and political situation in Laos—an appraisal that, according to subcommittee aides, the executive branch reluctantly agreed could be published.

"Most observers in Laos say that from the military point of view, the situation there is growing steadily worse," the report said, "and the initiative seems clearly to be in the hands of the enemy." It added:

"There are apparently no plans for retaking or holding any of the two-thirds of the country no longer under Government control but only a hope, not too firmly held in some quarters, that the one-third of Laos territory now under Government control can continue to be held."

The report said, "No one we met in Laos, American or Lao, seems to have a prescription for the future other than to continue to do what is being done now."

"In their most optimistic moments," it continued, "Lao and Americans, as well as most Western observers, expressed a guarded belief that the Lao will be able to cling to what remains of their territory, believing that the war in Vietnam will end in an agreed settlement in which the great powers will participate and that this will lead to a similar resolution of the situation in Laos."



The New York Times
Aug. 3, 1971
Shading shows approximately two-thirds of Laos that is no longer under control of the Vientiane Government.

\$130 Million Outlay In Laos War Cited

By GEORGE SHERMAN
Star Staff Writer

A previously classified Senate report released today indicates the United States secretly spent about \$130 million in the last fiscal year on "irregular" troops under CIA control in the Laos war.

The money, according to the staff report of a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee, supported 30,000 "Lao" irregulars operating in four of the five military regions of Laos, plus Thai irregulars operating mainly in the strategic Plain of Jars in North Laos.

The exact number of the Thai forces is deleted from the report by administration censors. But Sen. J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, after reading the uncensored report, on June 8 put the number of Thais at 4,800.

Long Negotiations

The version made public today follows five weeks of intensive negotiations between the authors of the report, James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose, and three representatives of the executive branch—one each from the State Department, Defense

Department, and Central Intelligence Agency.

It is the first time that CIA activities in Laos have been confirmed and given some detail publicly.

The report states that the Lao irregulars—called BG units after their French name, *battalions guerriers*—"are part of the irregular forces which are trained, equipped, supported, advised, and, to a great extent, organized by the CIA."

These forces, the report continues, have become the "cutting edge" of the Lao military forces, far more active and effi-

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cent than the 60,000-man Royal Lao Army.

Sen. Stuart Symington, D-Mo., chairman of the security subcommittee which sent Lowenstein and Moose to Laos for 12 days, April 22 and May 4, said it was "an encouraging sign that the executive branch has finally agreed that much of what the United States government has been doing in Laos may now be made public."

But he hit the continued unwillingness of the administration "to acknowledge certain truths"—mainly the composition and command arrangements for the Thai troops in Laos.

Most Exact Figures

On June 7, Symington presented the whole uncensored report to an executive session of the Senate. A "sanitized" version of the debate behind closed doors is to appear in the Congressional Record tomorrow.

For the public record, the 23-page report today manages to give the most exact figures to date on the cost of the secret operation, but overall totals still are obtained only by putting together bits and pieces of what the administration has allowed through censorship.

For instance, a key passage lists a total of \$284.2 million as the total U.S. expenditure in Laos in the fiscal year ending June 30—exclusive of bombing costs. That \$284.2 million, the report says, is made up of "an estimated \$162.2 million in military assistance, \$52 million in the AID program (economic) and \$(deleted) spent by CIA exclusive of the Thai irregular costs."

By school-boy mathematics—uncontested by administration representatives—that makes the CIA budget for irregulars \$70 million.

In addition, Secretary of State William P. Rogers said June 15 that the total U.S. expenditures in Laos in fiscal 1971—exclusive of bombing—was \$350 million, not \$284.2 million.

That makes an additional \$65.8 million spent.

Committee sources say part of that \$65.8 million went for additional and unexpected expenditures after the staff was in Laos. But the vast bulk was to pay for the Thai irregulars—a figure deleted from the report.

Therefore, a conclusion, produced from the report, sources close to the Senate committee and public statements by Rogers, is that the U.S. spent about \$130 million on the activities of the "regulars in Laos—Lao and Thai irregulars."

Rogers' Estimate

Also for the first time, the report produces official figures to document the steeply rising costs of the Laos war since 1963. For the fiscal year 1972 which began July 1, the overt military assistance program alone is to cost \$252.1 million.

That is more than double the \$162.2 million spent in fiscal 1971, more than three times the amount spent in fiscal 1967, and 25 times greater than the \$11.9 million first spent in fiscal 1963.

Information on the Thai irregulars is the most censored. All

reference to Thai officers and regular units is deleted, for instance, although Fulbright on July 21 said there was a Thai general using a pseudonym with the Thai forces.

The Thai units, said Fulbright, "are recruited in Thailand and they are under the command of, the tactical immediate command of, Thai officers. A lot of them are regular army officers, and a lot of them are recruits."

But the administration, in answer to Senate charges that this Thai operation violates an amendment against foreign forces in Laos or Cambodia, has said that the Thais are "volunteers" under Lao command and not organized in their own units.

The report today makes the point that Thais are needed because of the dwindling "military manpower base" in Laos. That is estimated at 114,765, says the report, and is "exhausted" by the demands of the Lao army and irregulars. Gen. Vang Pao's forces, the Lao irregulars, have lost 3,272 killed and 5,426 wounded since 1967, it says.

The report says that, despite the huge expenditures of American money and Lao and Thai manpower, "most observers in Laos say that from the military point of view the situation there is growing steadily worse and the initiative seems clearly to be in the hands of the enemy."

Chinese Double

The report also finds that Chinese participation in Laos, along the road from the Chinese border into north central Laos, has more than doubled in two years. Up from 6,000 men, the Chinese force is now estimated by U.S. intelligence at between 14,000 and 20,000 men.

Since November 1970, the report says, the Chinese, besides improving previous road construction, have installed eight small-arms firing ranges usually associated with ground garrisons, plus antiaircraft guns, raising the total to 395.

Deeper CIA Role in Laos Revealed

By Laurence Stern

Washington Post Staff Writer

The Central Intelligence Agency spent about \$70 million to operate an army of irregular forces numbering more than 30,000 men in Laos during Fiscal 1971, a Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff report disclosed yesterday.

The report portrayed a far broader picture of clandestine American involvement in the Laotian war than previously known as the BGs (after the French bataillons guerriers), than had previously surfaced publicly in Washington.

The 23-page document, prepared by Committee staff members James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose, was released yesterday by Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), chairman of the subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad.

There has been a widespread conception as a result of Symington subcommittee hearings and newspaper articles two years ago, that the principal CIA-trained guerrilla force in Laos was concentrated in the Plain of Jars under the leadership of Meo Gen. Vang Pao.

But the new report, based on interviews with American military and diplomatic officials in Laos, asserts that BG "irregular" forces are operating in all but one of the five military regions of Laos. Only 38 per cent of the irregulars are under Vang Pao's command in the second military region, which encompasses the Plain of Jars.

The BG irregulars, says the Senate report, are playing a far more important role in the Laotian war than the Royal Lao Army. They have taken heavier casualties and accounted for higher enemy kills than the regular Lao army forces.

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In the 1968 to early 1971 period, for example, the BGs reportedly suffered 8,020 killed, and accounted for 22,726 enemy deaths, according to official figures. The Royal Lao Army in the same period lost 3,664 and reported an enemy kill of 8,522.

"The most effective military force in Laos is not the Royal Lao Army, but the force known previously as the *Armee Clandessine* . . . and now as the BGs . . . The BG units are part of the irregular forces which are trained, equipped, supported, advised, and to a great extent, organized by the CIA," the report asserts.

"The BG units have become the cutting edge of the Lao military forces, as one U.S. official puts it."

The irregular units, says the staff report, "do most of the day-to-day patrolling, ambushing and attacking throughout the country." They are "closely" supervised and fed and paid by the CIA. Unlike the Royal Lao Army, the Senate document says, the BGs are guaranteed evacuation by Air America helicopters (a CIA-organized airline) and medical care—in some cases provided in a U.S. field hospital at the Royal Thai Air Force base in Udorn, Thailand.

It took five weeks of negotiation with the Nixon administration to release the sanitized version of the report. The document is shot through with the word "deleted," which signifies omissions of facts and numbers insisted upon by executive agencies.

But the first time the CIA permitted itself to be referred

to by name in a published document.

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protested, however, the administration's continued refusal to

declassify much of the information bearing on U.S. support of Thai military forces in Laos.

Members of the Foreign Relations Committee have taken the position that the Thai

units which have been acknowledged by the administration to be fighting in Laos are

in violation of the Fulbright Amendment to the 1971 defense authorization and procurement bills. It prohibits

American financing of third country forces in Cambodia and Laos and was designed to prevent further escalation of the U.S. role in the Indo-

chinese war.

Most references to Thai troops in Laos were sanitized from the staff report. Foreign Relations Committee sources, however, indicated that the United States may have spent

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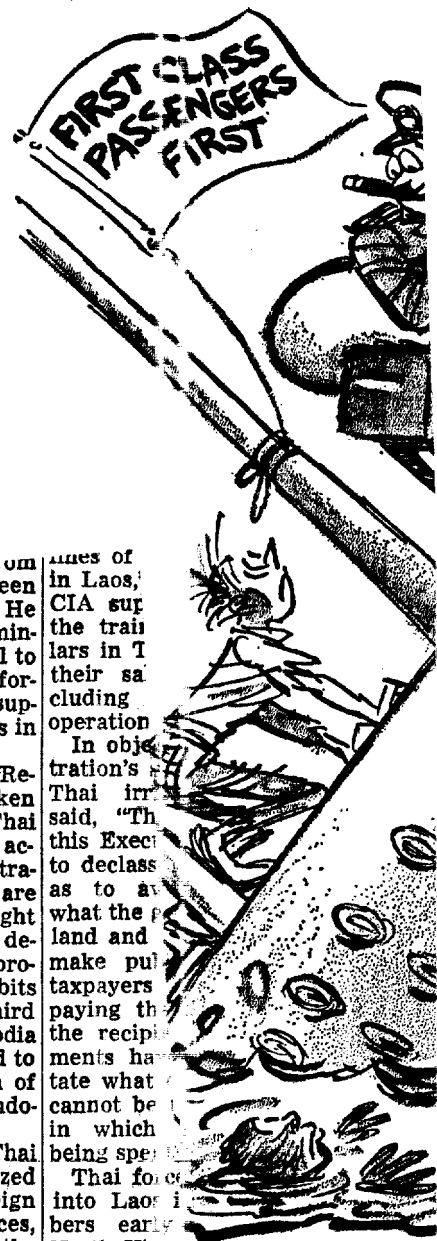
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